

## **Commitment in a Relationship**

John Gottman, a renowned psychologist and researcher in the field of couples therapy, has identified several key components that contribute to the success and longevity of relationships. One of these components is "commitment." According to Gottman, commitment in a relationship involves a psychological and emotional dedication to the partnership.

Gottman emphasizes the importance of commitment as a fundamental aspect of healthy relationships. Commitment, in this context, means a willingness to invest time, energy, and effort into the relationship, even in the face of challenges and difficulties. It goes beyond a simple decision to stay together; it involves actively working to maintain and strengthen the bond between partners.

In Gottman's research, he has found that couples with a high level of commitment are more likely to navigate conflicts effectively, support each other's goals and aspirations, and sustain a positive emotional connection over time. Commitment is seen as a protective factor that helps couples weather the storms that may arise in the course of a relationship.

Gottman's work often emphasizes the importance of building a strong foundation of friendship, emotional intimacy, and positive interactions to foster commitment in a relationship. Additionally, he has developed various principles and techniques, such as the "Sound Relationship House," to help couples strengthen their commitment and create a healthy and lasting connection.

## **Resolvable Problems and Perpetual Problems**

John Gottman categorizes relationship issues into two main types: resolvable problems and perpetual problems.

### **1. Resolvable Problems:**

- These are issues or conflicts that can be addressed, discussed, and resolved through communication and compromise.
- Resolvable problems are often situational and may arise from differences in preferences, habits, or lifestyle.
- Couples can work together to find common ground, negotiate, and implement solutions that satisfy both partners.

### **2. Perpetual Problems:**

- Perpetual problems are issues that tend to persist over time and may not have a clear solution.
- These problems often stem from fundamental differences in personality, values, or core needs.
- While they may not be fully solvable, couples can learn to manage perpetual problems by understanding and accepting each other's perspectives.
- It's crucial for partners to develop a sense of humor, empathy, and patience when dealing with perpetual problems.

According to Gottman's research, about 69% of conflicts in a relationship are perpetual. These perpetual problems may never be completely resolved, but couples can learn to navigate them in a way that minimizes tension and preserves the overall health of the relationship. Gottman emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting each other's differences, as well as finding ways to compromise and coexist peacefully, especially when dealing with perpetual issues.

## **Contracts and Expectations**

John Gottman's research and approach to understanding relationships include the concepts of "contracts" and "expectations" as important elements in couples' interactions. These concepts are part of his broader framework for understanding how couples build and maintain healthy relationships. Here's an explanation of these ideas:

### **1. Contracts:**

- In the context of relationships, a "contract" refers to the implicit or explicit agreements that partners make with each other regarding their roles, responsibilities, and expectations.
- These contracts can be spoken or unspoken and involve various aspects of the relationship, such as division of household chores, parenting responsibilities, communication styles, and emotional support.
- Couples often develop these contracts over time as they negotiate and navigate their shared life. The fulfillment of these agreements contributes to the overall health and satisfaction of the relationship.

### **2. Expectations:**

- Expectations in a relationship are the assumptions or anticipations that individuals have about their partner's behavior, actions, and the overall dynamics of the relationship.
- Expectations can be realistic or unrealistic, and they are shaped by individual values, beliefs, and past experiences.
- Gottman emphasizes the importance of understanding and managing expectations in a relationship. Unrealistic or uncommunicated expectations can lead to disappointment and conflict, while clear communication and alignment of expectations contribute to relationship satisfaction.

Gottman's research highlights the significance of being aware of these contracts and expectations within a relationship. Open and honest communication about each partner's needs, desires, and expectations is crucial for maintaining a strong and healthy connection. When couples are aware of their implicit contracts and can openly discuss and negotiate their expectations, they are better equipped to build a resilient and fulfilling relationship.

## Examples of the Implicit or Explicit Agreements

Implicit or explicit agreements are the understandings or expectations that partners have about various aspects of their relationship. Here are some examples:

1. **Communication Styles:**

- Couples may have implicit agreements about how they communicate with each other. For example, one partner may prefer to talk about issues immediately, while the other may need some time to process before discussing.

2. **Division of Household Chores:**

- Partners often make agreements about who is responsible for specific household tasks. This can include chores like cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, and taking care of children or pets.

3. **Financial Responsibilities:**

- Couples may have explicit or implicit agreements about how they handle finances. This could involve decisions about joint or separate bank accounts, budgeting, and spending limits.

4. **Intimacy and Affection:**

- Agreements regarding physical intimacy, affection, and sexual activity are crucial in a relationship. These can include expectations about frequency, types of intimacy, and the emotional aspects of physical connection.

5. **Parenting Roles:**

- Couples often make agreements about how they will share parenting responsibilities. This includes decisions about discipline, education, and the time each partner spends with the children.

6. **Career and Ambitions:**

- Partners may have implicit agreements about how they support each other's career goals and ambitions. This can involve decisions about relocating for a job, supporting each other's professional growth, and managing work-life balance.

7. **Social Time and Independence:**

- Agreements about socializing, spending time together, and allowing space for individual pursuits are common. Couples may negotiate how much time they spend with friends, engage in hobbies separately, and respect each other's need for alone time.

8. **Conflict Resolution:**

- Couples may have implicit agreements about how they approach and resolve conflicts. This can involve strategies such as taking breaks during heated arguments, using "I" statements, and seeking compromise.

It's important to note that these agreements evolve over time based on the couple's interactions and habits.

## Examples of Global and Specific Expectations

John Gottman's research on relationships includes the concept of global and specific expectations, which refer to the broader overarching beliefs about the relationship (global expectations) and the more detailed anticipations regarding specific behaviors (specific expectations). Here are some examples of each:

### Global Expectations:

#### 1. Emotional Support:

- Global Expectation: "I expect my partner to be emotionally supportive when I'm going through challenging times."
- This encompasses a broad belief about the overall emotional climate of the relationship.

#### 2. Commitment:

- Global Expectation: "I expect my partner to be committed to our relationship for the long term."
- This reflects a fundamental belief in the enduring nature of the partnership.

#### 3. Trust:

- Global Expectation: "I expect my partner to be trustworthy and honest."
- Trust is a foundational global expectation in many relationships.

#### 4. Respect:

- Global Expectation: "I expect my partner to treat me with respect and kindness."
- This sets a standard for the overall tone of interactions within the relationship.

#### 5. Shared Values:

- Global Expectation: "I expect my partner and I to share similar values and goals in life."
- This involves a broader perspective on the alignment of core beliefs.

### Specific Expectations:

#### 1. Communication Frequency:

- Specific Expectation: "I expect my partner to check in with me at least once during the workday."
- This is a more detailed expectation about a specific behavior related to communication.

#### 2. Help with Household Chores:

- Specific Expectation: "I expect my partner to help with dishes after dinner every night."
- This involves a specific agreement regarding a shared responsibility.

#### 3. Celebrating Milestones:

- Specific Expectation: "I expect my partner to remember and celebrate our anniversary with a thoughtful gesture."
  - This sets a clear expectation for a specific behavior during a particular occasion.
4. **Quality Time:**
- Specific Expectation: "I expect my partner to spend at least one evening per week dedicated to quality time together without distractions."
  - This outlines a specific expectation related to the amount and quality of time spent together.
5. **Handling Conflict:**
- Specific Expectation: "I expect my partner to listen actively and avoid raising their voice during disagreements."
  - This specifies behaviors related to conflict resolution.

Understanding and discussing both global and specific expectations is crucial for couples to build a shared understanding of their relationship dynamics. Open communication about these expectations allows partners to align their beliefs and behaviors, fostering a healthier and more satisfying relationship.

## Turning Expectations into Hopes in a Relationship

Turning expectations into hopes in a relationship involves shifting from a rigid and demanding mindset to one that is more flexible, understanding, and open to variations in behavior and circumstances. This shift can contribute to a healthier and more resilient relationship. Here are some key aspects to consider:

1. **Recognizing Unreasonable Expectations:**
  - Start by recognizing expectations that may be unrealistic or overly rigid. Unrealistic expectations can set the stage for disappointment and frustration.
2. **Open Communication:**
  - Foster open and honest communication with your partner. Discuss your expectations openly, acknowledging that these are your feelings and desires rather than mandates.
3. **Understanding Individual Differences:**
  - Recognize and appreciate the individual differences between you and your partner. People have unique personalities, communication styles, and ways of approaching various aspects of life.
4. **Flexibility and Adaptability:**
  - Shift from expecting specific outcomes to being open to various possibilities. Understand that life is dynamic, and situations may not always unfold exactly as planned.
5. **Cultivating Gratitude:**
  - Focus on gratitude for the positive aspects of your relationship rather than dwelling on unmet expectations. Acknowledge and appreciate the efforts your partner puts into the relationship.
6. **Expressing Hopes Instead of Demands:**
  - Instead of stating expectations as demands, express your hopes and desires. Use language that communicates your feelings without imposing a sense of obligation on your partner.
  - Example:
    - Expectation: "You should always remember our special dates."
    - Hope: "I hope we can celebrate our special dates together in a way that feels meaningful to both of us."
7. **Embracing Imperfection:**
  - Understand that both you and your partner are human and prone to imperfections. Embrace the imperfections and quirks that make each of you unique.
8. **Building a Team Mentality:**
  - Shift from an individualistic mindset to a team mentality. Approach challenges as a team, working together to find solutions rather than placing blame for unmet expectations.
9. **Setting Healthy Boundaries:**

- Establish and communicate healthy boundaries within the relationship.  
Clarify what is essential for each of you and where flexibility can be applied.

**10. Focusing on the Present:**

- Avoid dwelling on past disappointments or projecting too far into the future.  
Focus on building a positive and fulfilling present together.

Remember that relationships require ongoing effort, compromise, and a willingness to adapt. By transforming expectations into hopes, you create a more positive and constructive atmosphere, allowing room for growth and mutual understanding in the relationship.